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Message Text

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20
ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ADP-00 DEA-05 CIAE-00 INR-10 JUSE-00

NSAE-00 RSC-01 SNM-02 SY-10 TRSE-00 USIA-15 NSC-10

SCI-06 OMB-01 SS-15 HEW-08 DODE-00 L-03 RSR-01 /115 W
---------- 047040
R 250526Z JUL 73
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7026
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
USMISSION GENEVA
CINCPAC
USLO PEKING UNN

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 1719

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SNAR, BM, TH
SUBJECT: NARCOTICS: CAPTURE OF LO HSING-HAN: ASSESSMENT

REF: A. STATE 142910
B. RANGOON 1681
C. RANGOON 1689

FOR AMBASSADOR HANDLEY

SUMMARY: LO'S CAPTURE SHOULD: (A) DISRUPT AT LEAST TEMPORARILY FLOW OF ILLICIT NARCOTICS, (B) HAVE CONSIDERABLE DETERRENT EFFECT ON LESSER TRAFFICKERS, (C) STIMULATE FURTHER GUB ANTI-NARCOTICS ACTIONS, (D) ENCOURAGE GUB-RTG COOPERATION IN NARCOTICS SUPPRESSION. JUDGING BY MOMENTUM AND SUCCESS OF RECENT GUB ACTIONS, WE EXPECT BURMESE TO KEEP UP VIROROUS ANTI-NARCOTICS CAMPAIGN BUT WE CONTINUE TO SEE PROBLEM AS LONG WAY FROM SOLUTION AND IN NEED OF U.S.
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AND GUB SUPPORT. END SUMMARY.

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1. IN ASSESSING IMPACT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF REMOVING
LO HSING-HAN FROM ILLICIT NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING IN SEA,
WE ESTIMATE THAT FOLLOWING CONSEQUENCES ARE LIKELY TO
FLOW FROM THIS CERTAINLY MOST DRAMATIC AND, TOGETHER WITH
DESTRUCTION OF TACHILEK REFINERIES, PROBABLY MOST
IMPORTANT SINGLE ACTION THUS FAR IN THE CAMPAIGN.

A. REMOVAL OF KINGPIN WHO MADE BASIC DECISIONS SHOULD
CREATE CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION IN ENTIRE WEB OF NARCOTICS
INFRASTRUCTURE IN BURMA AND THAILAND AND DISRUPT
TRAFFICKING SYSTEM AND FLOW AT LEAST FOR SOME MONTHS.

B. MORALE OF ALL ILLICIT NARCOTICS TRAFFICERS IN BURMA
HAS PROBABLY SUFFERED SEVERE BLOW. DESPITE ALL GUB,
RTG AND US EFFORTS FOR PAST TWO YEARS, LO APPEARED
ABLE TO OPERATE WITH IMPUNITY. FACT THAT SO-CALLED
KING OF OPIUM EMPIRE HAS BEEN DETHRONED WILL NATURALLY
INCREASE APPREHENSIONS OF LESSER FIGURES THAT THEY MAY
BE NEXT ON LIST AND WILL SUFFER SAME FATE. DETERRENT
EFFECT OF CAPTURE OF LO SHOULD THEREFORE BE SUBSTANTIAL.

C. QUESTION WHETHER SUCCESSOR TO LO WILL EMERGE NOW
ARISES. HIS BROTHER LO HSING-MING WOULD HAVE BEEN A
NATURAL, BUT GUB TOOK HIM INTO CUSTODY SEVERAL WEEKS
AGO (WITH LO HSING-HAN'S WIFE) AND CAN NO DOUBT HOLD HIM
INDEFINITELY. EVIDENT BREAKUP OF LO FAMILY'S CONTROL AND
POWER CREATES SITUATION INWHICH IT MAY BE SOME TIME
BEFORE ANY SINGLE PERSON OR GROUP WILL ACHIEVE ANYTHING
LIKE HIS INFLUENCE. DETERRENT EFFECT NOTED IN B ABOVE
MAY MEAN THAT NO TRUE SUCCESSOR WILL EMERGE AND THAT LOWER
LEVEL INDIVIDUALS CONTROLLING LIMITED SEGMENTS OF TRAF-
FICKING ACTIVITIES WILL BE CONTENT, IN FACE OF LO'S
FATE, SIMPLY TO TRY TO MAINTAIN THEIR EXISTING STATUS
AND PROFITABILITY.

D. IT SHOULD BE POWERFUL SHOT IN THE ARM FOR GUB'S ANTI-
NARCOTIC MEASURES. DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER HLA PHONE
ASSURED AMBASSADOR THAT GUB WOULD CONTINUWAITS ACTIONS AGAINST
NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS (REF B). IN SO ACTING GUB DOUBT-
LESS APPRECIATES THAT NARCOTICS PEDDLING PAYS FOR INSURGENCY.

E. IN SEEKING TO CONVEY TO BURMESE PUBLIC IMPRESSION
THAT LO'S CAPTURE WAS HAPPY RESULT OF GUB/RTG COORDINATION
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(REF C), GUB HAS MADE DEPARTURE OF ITS EARLIER "GO
IT ALONE" POSTURE. WHILE THIS IS PROBABLY PARTIALLY
RESULT OF DESIRE TO CLAIM SOME OF CREDIT FOR LO'S
SEIZURE, IT MAY ALSO REPRESENT EMBRYO COOPERATION WITH RTG
IN OTHER ANTI-NARCOTICS EXERCISES, AND MAY LIKEWISE
INDICATE INTENTION TO PUBLICIZE HOPED-FOR FUTURE COOPER-
ATION WITH UN AND OTHER NATIONS, INCLUDING U.S.

F. KEY QUESTION, WHICH HAS IMPORTANT BEARING ON ABOVE

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ASPECTS, IS WHETHER GUB WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN EXTRADITION EFFORTS. RTG STATEMENTS THUS FAR APPEAR TO THROW NO OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF RETURNING LO TO BURMA, A MOVE WHICH THE THAI WOULD APPEAR TO WELCOME.

2. IMPORTANT AS IS LO'S CAPTURE, WE BELIEVE IT SHOULD NOT BE ASSESSED IN ISOLATION BUT IN CONTEXT OF VIGOROUS ACTIONS TAKEN BY GUB IN RECENT MONTHS, AS WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY REPORTED. IN SHORT, GUB HAS DEMOLISHED HEROIN REFINERY COMPLEX AROUND TACHILEK, SEIZED KKYS BY THE THROAT (CAPTURE OF LO HEING ONE RESULT), AND SIMULTANEOUSLY MOVED AGAINST IBMND FORCES, ALSO LONG ENGAGED IN OPIUM TRADING. THESE AND OTHER DETERMINED MEASURES PROVIDE CONCRETE EVIDENCE THAT MIS CHIEF COLONEL TIN OO WAS CORRECT WHEN HE TOLD US AT BEGINNING OF YEAR THAT WE WOULD BE SURPRISED AT DEVELOPMENTS IN NEXT TWELVE MONTHS.

3. WE ALSO BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT LO'S CAPTURE SHOULD NOT BE OVERPLAYED TO THE POINT OF BECOMING TOO OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE IMMEDIACY OR EASE OF ELIMINATING LONG-STANDING OPIUM GROWING - NARCOTICS PEDDLING PROBLEMS. RATHER, THIS DEVELOPMENT ACCENTUATES THE WISDOM OF OUR TAKING STEPS SUCH AS PROVIDING GUB WITH BETTER NARCOTICS CONTROL EQUIPMENT AND OF CONTINUING SUPPORT OF UNFDAC PROGRAMS IN SEA. HOPEFULLY BALANCE OF 1973 WILL RECORD FURTHER EFFECTIVE ACTIONS BY GUB.
MARTIN

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